

THE COUNTY'S GENERAL PLAN

San Luis Obispo County Department of Planning and Building

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INTRODUCTION

The San Luis Obispo County Department of Planning and Building has prepared this guide to the County's General Plan to help you better understand the planning process. This guide describes what a general plan is, what it is legally required to contain, and how it affects land development in the unincorporated areas of San Luis Obispo County.

In addition to the county's general plan, each of the seven incorporated cities within San Luis Obispo County also has a general plan that covers land within its jurisdiction. The county's general plan does not affect land within the seven incorporated cities.

The San Luis Obispo County General Plan is the foundation upon which all land use decisions are based. Its main purposes are to illustrate the public policy for future land use for both public and private lands, and to provide the County Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, Subdivision Review Board and Zoning Administrator (Hearing Officer) with specific direction for future decisions affecting land use development.

WHY DO WE HAVE A GENERAL PLAN?

California Planning Law requires the adoption of a comprehensive plan:

"Each planning agency shall prepare and the legislative body of each county and city shall adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency's judgment bears relation to its planning."

-Government Code Section 65300

There are seven required general plan "elements":

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| ◆ Land Use | ◆ Conservation | ◆ Circulation |
| ◆ Open Space | ◆ Housing | ◆ Noise ◆ Safety |

The first state law requiring the preparation of a comprehensive plan was adopted in 1927. In 1955, the preparation of a two-element comprehensive plan, which included land use and circulation, was required. Housing was added as a required element in 1967, Conservation and Open Space in 1970, Seismic Safety, Noise and Scenic Highways in 1971, and Safety in 1975. In 1984, Scenic Highways was dropped as a mandatory element and Seismic Safety was merged with Safety, resulting in the seven elements that are required today.

In addition to the required elements, a city or county may adopt optional elements. The county has adopted seven optional elements:

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|-------------------|------------|------------------------------|
| ◆ Recreation | ◆ Historic | ◆ Esthetic |
| ◆ Offshore Energy | ◆ Energy | ◆ Economic ◆ Agriculture |

Because all elements of the general plan have equal legal status, the general plan must resolve potential conflicts between or among the elements through clear language and consistent policy.

A portion of the county is within the coastal zone, which is a specific area designated by the 1976 California Coastal Act. The Land Use Element/Local Coastal Plan applies to the portions of the county within the coastal zone. The Land Use Element applies to areas outside of the coastal zone - the inland portions of the county.

REQUIRED & OPTIONAL ELEMENTS

Land Use Element (Inland & Coastal)



The Land Use Element (LUE) has the broadest scope of the seven required elements. It designates the general distribution and intensity of uses of land for housing, commercial, industry, open space, education, public facilities, and other categories of both public and private uses. Because the LUE is so extensive, it is sometimes mistaken for the entire general plan. Through its text and maps, the

LUE establishes the pattern for land use and sets out clear standards for development. For more information, see "Users Guide to the LUE & LUO". There are three components that make up both the Inland LUE and the Coastal Zone LUE.

◆ Framework for Planning

Framework for Planning provides a comprehensive overview of the county's land use policies and defines land use categories (zoning). It also contains Coastal Table O, a matrix that specifies the uses that are allowed in each land use category, and provides a definition for each type of use for properties located in the Coastal Zone. This table is located in the Land Use Ordinance for the Inland portions of the County. Framework also sets the guidelines for amendments to the general plan and ordinance.

◆The Area Plans

U Coastal Zone

- North Coast
- Estero
- San Luis Bay
- South County

U Inland

- Nacimiento
- Adelaida
- Salinas River
- El Pomar/Estrella
- Shandon/Carrizo
- Las Pilitas
- Los Padres
- San Luis Obispo
- San Luis Bay
- Huasna/Lopez
- South County

The Area Plans are 15 separate reports, divided by geographic area, that contain policies, programs, land use regulations and maps. In the Coastal Zone, each area plan also establishes development standards, called planning area standards, that set special requirements. These standards are found in the Land Use Ordinance for the Inland portions of the County.

◆Official Maps

The up-to-date Official Maps of the LUE show precisely where the land use categories are applied. They act as the county's zoning maps.

Within the coastal zone of the county there is an additional component, the Coastal Plan Policies.

Agriculture & Open Space Element



The Agriculture and Open Space Element not only establishes strategies for protecting and preserving open space resources, but also provides strategies for maintaining productive agriculture in the county. It identifies lands which are appropriate for preservation as open space. It contains policies and measures for: preserving areas of open space, protection of natural resources, managed production of resources, outdoor recreation, public health and safety, and identification of agricultural land.

Transportation Plan



The Transportation Plan acts as the required Circulation Element. As each Area Plan is updated, this Plan is being replaced with a Circulation Element within each Area Plan.

The Transportation Plan identifies the general location of existing and proposed roads and provides definitions of road types (i.e., arterial, collector, local). Maps accompanying the area plans show the location of roads, their classification and any proposed extensions or realignments.

The plan also sets policy for bikeways, transit, and other transportation modes including harbors, pipelines, and utility lines.

Recreation Plan



The Recreation Plan is an optional element of the general plan designed to preserve and protect the county's existing and proposed recreation resources.

This element is currently under revision to become the Parks & Recreation Element. Once adopted, this element will combine, update and replace the existing Recreation Element, Parks & Recreation Master Plan and the Trails Plan.

Environment Plan



The Environment Plan contains three elements; Conservation, Historic and Esthetic. The only required element is the Conservation Element. The Conservation Element addresses the conservation, development, and use of natural resources including water, forests, soils, rivers and minerals.

The goal of the Historic Element is the preservation of sites, buildings, and areas that are of historical significance in the county. The Esthetic Element deals with esthetic conservation by addressing primarily with noise, odor and visual pollution. It supplements the Noise Element and also provides a basis for regulations that help prevent visual deterioration of scenic areas.

Noise Element



The Noise Element identifies and evaluates major sources of noise within the county. It defines measures to be used by new development to reduce noise to a level that is not damaging or disruptive. The Noise Element has two parts; the Policy Document and the Acoustical Design Manual.

Housing Element



The Housing Element is an assessment of housing needs for all segments of the community and all economic groups. It provides an evaluation of the county's housing problems, including an analysis of the housing supply and the availability of affordable housing. The Housing Element provides information concerning the amount of land and dwelling units needed to provide a full range of housing, consistent with the California Housing and Community Development Department's determination of the county's regional share of housing need, in the Regional Housing Needs Plan.

Safety



The Safety Element establishes policies and programs to protect the community from risks associated with fires, flood, geologic hazards, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. In order to reduce loss of life, injuries, and damage to property, the Safety Element requires safety to be considered in the planning and development process.

Economic Element



The Economic Element was adopted to establish a commitment to economic vitality, to set priorities for types and locations of desirable economic development and to identify strategies for retaining existing businesses and attracting new ones that provide employment for county residents. The Economic Element's main goal is to recognize the importance of economic activity in enabling the residents to find employment and pursue the lifestyles they value.

Energy Element



The Energy Element was developed to enhance public awareness of energy efficiency and conservation. It is an educational document with policies that will be implemented through discretionary approvals of development projects.

Energy Element (Offshore)



The Energy Element (Offshore) was developed to enhance public awareness and participation in decisions regarding offshore oil and gas activities and related onshore facilities. It is an educational document that provide a summary of county policy and direction regarding development of off-shore petroleum resources.

IMPLEMENTING THE GENERAL PLAN

In San Luis Obispo County, all required elements of the general plan have been adopted. These elements are implemented through a variety of ordinances that are adopted as part of the county code.

The Land Use Ordinance (LUO) and the Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinance (CZLUO) provide the principal method for implementation of the general plan by setting requirements for how particular land uses may be designed and developed. They also provide a legal basis for how the policies of the Land Use Element are implemented and enforced.

The LUO and CZLUO contain development standards and permit procedures for land development, including features of site design, such as minimum parcel size, required setbacks, building heights, number and design of off-street parking spaces, and standards for grading, drainage and tree removal.

In addition, the general plan is implemented through the *Real Property Division Ordinance* and the *Building and Construction Ordinance*. The Real Property Division Ordinance contains the technical regulations and procedures for land divisions. The Building and Construction Ordinance, in conjunction with the Uniform Building Code, Plumbing Code, Mechanical Code, etc., contains the technical code requirements for building construction.

The Growth Management Ordinance, which sets an annual rate of growth to ensure it does not outpace the available resources, also implements the general plan.

The Address and Road Name Ordinance implements the general plan by specifying requirements and standards for naming of roads, addressing of properties and installation of road signs and individual addresses for structures. This ordinance was developed to aid public safety officials in locating properties during times of emergency.

AMENDMENT AND UPDATE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

State law allows the general plan to be amended up to four times a year, with the exception that the plan can be amended at any time to accommodate projects that provide affordable housing. Changes to the general plan, including changes to the land use categories assigned to an individual property, can be initiated by private individuals or by the county. The first step in amending the general plan is to receive authorization from the Board of Supervisors to process the amendment. After an application is submitted, the department forwards the request to the Board. If the decision is made to continue with the review of the amendment and authorization is granted, the project will be reviewed for possible environmental impacts. A staff analysis is prepared and the project is reviewed during public hearings by the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. The Commission can hear an amendment at any time throughout the year. The Board typically schedules these hearings in Spring, Summer and Winter, with a fourth time period held in reserve for special circumstances. Notices of these hearings are printed in local newspapers.

In order to keep the general plan elements up-to-date and to respond to changing issues and conditions, comprehensive updates of entire general plan elements are periodically prepared by the department. These updates include participation by community advisory councils and the general public. For more information, see the "Users Guide to the General Plan Amendment Process".

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

The intent of this guide is to provide an introduction to the requirements and contents of the general plan. Since this pamphlet only presents an overview, more detailed questions can be answered by the Department of Planning and Building staff. The department is located at the County Government Center, in Room 200 of the Old Courthouse at the corner of Osos and Palm Streets in downtown San Luis Obispo. The phone number is (805) 781-5600.